

CORRESPONDENCE

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Hereditary Genius

To the Editor, Eugenics Review.

SIR,—In the last issue of the *EUGENICS REVIEW*, October 1950, attention is drawn to the subsidised new edition of Galton's *Hereditary Genius*. On numerous occasions, I have expressed doubt to influential members of the *Eugenics Society* as to the desirability of reprinting this volume. The *Society* did not, of course, share my views but perhaps you would be kind enough to give them space in your columns?

Hereditary Genius, although a source of delight for antiquarians, is not one of Galton's great contributions to science and, according to the information from Macmillan & Co., it has long ceased to be in public demand. It contains many errors and ill-considered statements, and its whole trend is liable to mislead those unacquainted with the history and methods of human genetics. In particular, the assumption on which the enquiry is based, namely, that reputation is a reliable index of ability (p.37) is almost certainly untrue.

On p.36, Galton erred in assuming that there are "400 idiots and imbeciles to every million of persons living in the country." This frequency enabled him to form a symmetrical distribution of intelligence which agreed with Quetelet's ideas about the distribution of stature. But on p.25, the information from Dr. Seguin had already shown the incidence of these types to be 1 in 400 or 2,500 per million. There are less important oversights also, such as mixing up W. A. Mozart and his father, (p.245).

Then, what are we to make of the strange chapters on racial and national ability? On p.339, Galton states that "The number among the negroes of those whom we should call half-witted men, is very large. Every book alluding to negro servants in America is full of instances." Again, on p.361, we are told that "England has certainly got rid of a great deal of refuse through means of emigration" and so on.

If the *Eugenics Society* desired to spend money on reprinting Galton's writings, why did they choose this one out of two hundred works unless it was to prove once again that great men are not infallible? Many people would have welcomed an edition of *Memories* or some of his important but rather inaccessible scientific papers.

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Biological Aspects of Totalitarianism

To the Editor, Eugenics Review.

SIR,—I have not seen attention drawn to a biological aspect of "Communism," or more accurately Totalitarianism as practised by the U.S.S.R. to-day.

It is a commonplace of natural selection that within a multi-cellular organism the exterminating rigour of an environment is transferred from acting on the individual cell to acting upon the organism as a whole. The individual cell is thus freed to specialise in an endless number of ways and, indeed, becomes so specialised that survival for the individual is quite impossible except when in full community with the major unit. At a more advanced stage of evolution collections of multi-cellular organisms band together and act as a gregarious unit (the ants'-nest, the herd, the tribe etc.) and the importance for survival is again no longer centred upon the individual member of the unit but is once more upon the unit as a whole.

With mankind the major unit is the sovereign state, and upon this unit natural selection acts with undiminished force; and within such units individual men and women have been freed to specialise and contribute in a great number of different ways to the survival and success of the unit. The converse is also true, but the point is that they are not personally exposed to any natural selection.

But Totalitarianism has re-introduced the old full pressure for survival back to individual men and women, who become deliberately selected from the mass of the population for any defection from the "Party Line," as I believe it is called, and are incarcerated in a labour camp for life—however short a duration that may prove to be.

It has been reasonably clear for some time past that the next great step in the evolution of *Homo Sapiens* must be on the mental plane, if it is to happen at all. And here we have before our eyes an artificial selection of full exterminating rigour taking place precisely on that plane. The Nazi and Fascist camps were parochial when compared with the enormous area and the immense number of individuals now involved.

What the outcome is likely to be must remain the subject of several melancholy reflections.

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